

Message Text

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11

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

DHA-02 IO-11 /075 W

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R 121856Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9124

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 0703

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, US, NU

SUBJECT: CHAMORRO OFFERED DEAL ON CENSORSHIP

1. BEFORE HE WAS ARRESTED FEBRUARY 11 (SEEP SEPTTEL) LA PRENSA PUBLISHER PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO REVEALED TO POLOFF THAT HE HAD BEEN VISITED AT HIS HOUSE BY PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY ROGER BERMUDEZ ON FEBRUARY 5 AND HAD BEEN ASKED TO CONSIDER "GUIDELINES" IN EXCHANGE FOR THE LIFTING OF PRESS CENSORSHIP. ACCORDING TO CHAMORRO, BERMUDEZ SAID THAT THE GON'S DIFFICULTY WITH LA PRENSA AROSE NOT FROM ITS CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS, BUT FROM ITS PERSONAL ATTACKS. CHAMORRO DENIED THAT HE ENGAGED IN PERSONAL, AS APART FROM POLITICAL, CRITICISM, BUT ASKED BERMUDEZ TO AMPLIFY. BERMUDEZ EXPLAINED THAT PRESIDENT SOMOZA WAS CONCERNED THAT CHAMORRO'S POLITICAL ANIMUM AGAINST HIM WAS SPILLING OVER INTO SOMOZA'S PERSONAL BUSINESS AFFAIRS WHICH HE CONSIDERED A PRIVATE MATTER. AS A RESULT, BERMUDEZ SAID HE WAS AUTHORIZED TO ASK CHAMORRO TO CONSIDER GUIDELINES WHEREBY SOMOZA'S PERSONAL BUSINESS DEALINGS WOULD BE OUT OF BOUNDS. IF ACCEPTED, LA PRENSA WOULD BE FREE TO REPORT ON ANYTHING ELSE IT DESIRED.

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CHAMORRO REPLIED THAT THE OFFER WAS TEMPTING, BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO

ACCEPT SINCE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOMOZA'S PUBLIC POWER AND HIS PRIVATE INTERESTS CONSTITUTED ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL JOURNALISTIC CONCERNS.

2. CHAMORRO SAID THAT TOWARD THE TAG END OF THE CONVERSATION DAVID GELBER, AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST RESEARCHING AN ARTICLE ON MANAGUA RECONSTRUCTION FOR NEW YORKER MAGAZINE WAS USHERED INTO HIS STUDY. FOLLOWING BERMUDEZ' DEPARTURE, CHAMORRO SAID HE CONVERSED AT LENGTH WITH GELBER ABOUT CENSORSHIP AS WELL AS RECONSTRUCTION AND GAVE HIM AMPLE DOCUMENTATION ON BOTH SUBJECTS.

3. COMMENT: IF CHAMORRO IS BELIEVED, THIS OVERTURE INDICATES STRONGLY AGAIN THAT THE PURPOSE OF CONTINUED CENSORSHIP DOES NOT DERIVE PRIMARILY FROM PUBLIC ORDER CONSIDERATIONS. WHILE SOMOZA MAY BE LESS THAN SYMPATHETIC TO THE ALLEGED DESIRE OF SOME OF HIS TOP APPOINTEES TO MAINTAIN CENSORSHIP AS A SHIELD AGAINST CRITICISM OF THEIR OWN QUESTIONABLE ACTIVITIES, HE IS NOT WILLING TO DECIDE AGAINST THEM AS LONG AS HIS OWN OX RISKS BEING GORED. THE PRESENCE OF THE AMERICAN REPORTER ON THE SCENE PROBABLY GUARANTEES THAT THE DEAL WILL BECOME PUBLIC WITH CONSEQUENT DAMAGE TO THE NEW IMAGE THAT SOMOZA IS CURRENTLY ATTEMPTING TO BUILD IN THE U.S.
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